

VIII. Working With Community Based Organizations

In planning your program activities and outreach to your target audience, keep in mind that local, community based organizations (CBOs) are a valuable outlet for reaching your audience. CBOs can include youth and civic organizations, associations, ethnic groups, faith-based organizations and advocacy groups, to name a few. Providing information at the grassroots level, via outlets that people respect and trust, can go a long way towards reaching your goal of increasing awareness or encouraging a change in behavior. CBOs might service mainstream, low-income groups or ethnic populations. Regardless, they can serve as one of the most valuable channels to disseminate information and communicate your message.

Working with diverse communities requires sensitivity, openness, and a genuine desire to know and work with the community on an ongoing basis. The key to success will be building trust and credibility. This often takes time, yet the rewards are significant.

A person's culture is a shared set of beliefs, assumptions, values, practices and experiences. It shapes how a person defines oneself, behavior, attitudes and how a person reacts to the wider community. A non-judgmental understanding of these different beliefs and practices, as well as how they differ from your own, will increase the effectiveness of your outreach. Find out what ways other organizations have approached outreach to specific communities and whether or not it has been successful. Then assess why they succeeded or failed.

Considerations and Ideas to Try

Some of the things to consider when conducting outreach in diverse communities are:

- Why do you want to work with this community?
- What are you trying to accomplish?
- How consistent is your goal with what the community would like to accomplish?
- Do you have the appropriate resources to work with the target community, including staff who are fluent in the language of your target audience?
- If your outreach is successful, how will you work to maintain the program after your organization completes its outreach?

- If not successful in your goals, how will you deal with this without damaging the relationships you have established in the community?

Additional factors to consider when planning outreach to ethnic and mainstream CBOs:

- What are and have been the major social and economic concerns of your target community? Are traffic safety issues a major concern for members of this community?
- What levels of literacy in English or other languages exist? What are the educational levels within the target community? Tailor outreach materials to meet the literacy and language needs of the audience.
- What is the predominant family structure (single parent, two-parent household, extended family group)? What are the traditional roles of different family members? Consider including extended family members in your outreach efforts. For example, if grandparents and other relatives are often caring for children, promoting occupant protection and child passenger restraint should also include outreach to family members other than parents.
- What are the demographics (elderly, youthful, young adults)? Give consideration to the channels, both formal and informal, this audience is likely to receive information from (TV, radio, print, Internet).
- What publications/broadcasting media influence this audience? Are members of your target audience likely to receive messages via the daily newspaper or bus shelter ads?

You'll also want to consider your own organization's ability to work with agencies and individuals in your target community. Consider the following:

- What is the range of cultural values and beliefs within your own organization? How are these different from those of your target community? Are they the same?
- How do your staff's beliefs influence their attitudes about a different community?
- Is your staff experienced in working with diverse communities?
- Do you need to provide education about diverse communities and/or sensitivity training for your staff?
- How will your target community respond to your staff?

Developing Relationships In Your Target Community

In conducting community outreach, it's important to engage many individuals from your target community from the onset, including representatives from the business sector, civic groups and churches. Develop relationships with key individuals who will become resources and planning experts. Start with five to ten individuals from the community or from organizations within the target community that share a common link to your issue (pedestrian safety, occupant protection, DUI). Draw from local law enforcement, business leaders, informal community leaders and healthcare professionals, among others.

Getting Started

You may already have working relationships with some of the community members mentioned above. Your organization might already enjoy a sound reputation and symbiotic relationship within the community, or, you might be just getting started. Whatever your situation, take inventory of what you already have to work with and develop a gameplan for getting started. Consider the following a springboard for future efforts:

1. Develop a comprehensive list of key organizations and community leaders who are likely partners for your message — don't limit yourself, include those who are newcomers as well. In addition to law enforcement and civic groups, tap into the business community, including retail, auto dealers, insurance agencies, child-focused retailers and entertainment venues catering to children.
2. Make initial contact with the key representative(s) from each organization and group on your list.
3. Invite them to a meeting to discuss partnership opportunities with your organization.
4. Hold a meeting to present the goals you are trying to achieve and obtain a commitment of participation from the organizations and individuals. For example, enlist business, social or healthcare leaders to assist with distribution of education materials to your target audience.
5. Make follow-up contact with meeting participants, as necessary, who have a potential interest in forming a partnership.
6. Be sure to engage community participation from the onset of developing your program. Obtaining accurate insight and receiving recommendations from key experts and gatekeepers early on is crucial if you are to develop an effective program or campaign.
7. Remember, it takes time. Do not expect miracles to happen overnight. Building relationships can be a lengthy process, but the payoff is well worth the investment.